

THE USE OF THE NARRATIVE APPROACH IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS' INTEGRATIVE MOTIVE

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ABSTRACT

This thesis describes a study carried out in response to the question, "How can I explore teaching approaches to develop integrative motive among Sixth-grade primary students in the Saudi School, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia?". In order to take suitable action and gain usable knowledge, I adopted Gardner's (1985, 2001, 2005) socio-educational model to operationally identify and measure the potential motivational factors in my teaching context. I also used an action research approach owing to its flexible nature and practical outcomes. The study vigorously went through three cycles which were meticulously guided by the voices of my students who presented evidence of conflicts when particular approaches did not serve them well. The first cycle was a fact finding cycle in which the mini Attitudinal Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) and a focus-group interview were used for data collection. I found out that the participants were instrumentally orientated to learning English. However, there was a noticeable decline in other integrative motivational constructs. This decline was largely attributed to the fact that neither the textbook nor the learning tasks were challenging or meaningful. Looking for a proper action, I implemented the Narrative Approach as an alternative teaching method in the second cycle. I found out that the storytelling activities promoted many integrative motivational factors among the participants. Nevertheless, being in a mixed-class, girls expressed their concern that the class was more dominated by boys and it would be more comfortable for them if they could have a single-sex-class. Considering students' feedback, I proceeded with storytelling sessions where boys and girls were segregated. I found out that the motivational intensity of both girls and boys was increased and they felt more comfortable during the segregation stage in the third cycle. In order to increase the quality of this action research study, I asked pre- and in-service Malaysian teachers to reflect on the whole study and relate it to their teaching context. The reflections of the participants corroborated the finding that storytelling did increase integrative motivational factors among the sixth-grade primary students. Additionally, reflecting on the action research study created a meaningful and a democratic communicative environment in which the in- and pre-service teachers gained insights, constructed meanings and obtained practical knowledge. Working on this thesis made an important contribution to my personal, educational and professional development and placing it in the public domain will, hopefully, enable other practitioners in similar situations to relate to my experiences and gain insights.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

One day an elephant appeared in a family's living room. Because the elephant was larger than the doors or windows, it seemed impossible to move it. The family, after several unsuccessful attempts to remove the animal, decided they could live with it in the room and proceeded to ignore the elephant's presence. To them the elephant soon became invisible. Sometime later a friend came to visit and upon seeing the elephant asked "Why's that in the living room?" Others came and when they saw it they exclaimed, "what is an elephant doing in your living room?" The family was forced by others to acknowledge that there was, in fact, an elephant in their house and set about finding a way to remove it—a fable(Denti and Guerin, 2004:113).

Denti and Guerin (2004) point out that educationalists should recognize the presence of their students' literacy problems, the elephant in the fable, and take the initiative to solve them professionally. However "some teachers reject to take an action as a possible mode of professional development because they say in essence, there is nothing we can change... everything is decided by the Ministry of the Inspectorate" (Wallace, 1998:22). These teachers take such an attitude because some inspectorates, decision makers, curriculum designers and researchers may not be aware of the reality of the learning situation in classrooms. To cap it all, teachers' points of view are hardly taken into consideration. Being obliged to follow the instructions of their authority, teachers start passively conforming to the practical recommendations of educational theorists and researchers (Shaik-Abdullah, 2005).

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